



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Los Angeles River Center & Gardens
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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: June 4, 2008

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XI: Consideration of resolution authorizing the acceptance of donation of fee title or conservation easement on all or a portion of APNs 5565-020-013, 014, 018, 019, 020 021, 022, 023, 024, 025, and 026; 5565-021-012 and 041; and 5569-006-009, 010, and 011, approximately 2.45-acres, Laurel Canyon, Mount Olympus.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the acceptance of donation of fee title or conservation easement on all or a portion of APNs 5565-020-013, 014, 018, 019, 020, 021, 022, 023, 024, 025, and 026; 5565-021-012 and 041; and 5569-006-009, 010, and 011, approximately 2.45-acres on the western boundary of Mount Olympus.

Background: On August 27, 2008, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) authorized the attached comment letter in response to a Notice of Preparation for the New Leaf Homes Draft Environmental Impact Report, ENV-2007-2769 EAF, City of Los Angeles. Initially, the project proposed 16 homes on a 22-lot site, of which there are five existing houses that have never been certified for occupancy. The EIR was required because community members sued the City. The comment letter requested that certain lots be permanently protected to maintain a wildlife corridor between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and Nichols Canyon.

Continued community pressure and negotiations have led to a new potential settlement in which sixteen lots would be permanently protected. Because of brushing requirements, to date staff has been firm about only accepting conservation easements. To break a log jam, staff put forward a proposal to accept a combination of fee simple lots and conservation easements. That proposal required that each of the five lots be combined with at least two additional fee simple lots with no development rights. The owner rejected that plan and has put the property on the market. The community had worked so hard to arrest this highly visible project from proceeding and expressed dismay that the MRCA was not

willing to shoulder some brush clearance requirement in order to solidify their hard fought gains.

Rather than roll the dice on those hard fought gains, staff factored in the balance between needing to keep key intra-mountain range wildlife corridors open and accepting reasonable amounts of brushing obligation. Staff prepared a second plan that would put substantially more of the sixteen lots under MRCA fee ownership (attached).

Two factors reduce the MRCA's financial risk. First, the area is already very clear of vegetation. Secondly the key community leaders are working with strong success to get commitments from surrounding homeowners to accept transfer of some of the adjacent fee simple parcels with conservation easements. Even a moderately successful number of transfers would significantly reduce the annual brush clearance cost.